

- President Bush Will Release Additional \$3.7 Billion in Funding Provided by Congress -

- Rep. Hall Led Democrats to Insist on the Release of \$3.7 Billion for Veterans Last Month -

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19), today hailed the release of the \$3.7 billion in additional veterans funding made available by Congress – providing the largest single funding increase in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Despite significant challenges facing the VA, the Bush Administration had indicated that it might block the release of funding passed by Congress for the VA. Hall, Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, led 46 of his colleagues who last month sent a letter to President Bush insisting that he release the money.

"I am relieved that the Bush Administration finally agreed to release this badly needed funding that Congress added to the President's budget last year," said Hall. "The VA is facing a mounting backlog of disability claims, understaffing, unacceptable waiting times for medical appointments, and a growing generation of Iraq and Afghanistan vets who will rely on its services for years to come. If there was ever a time to provide emergency funding for the VA, that time is now."

Congress included the additional \$3.7 billion for veterans in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008.

"An increase in veterans funding was Congress's number one priority this year," said Hall.

"Claims must be expedited for veterans returning from the war zone, especially those with invisible injuries such as Post Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury," said Jerry Donnellan, Rockland County Director of Veterans Service Agency. "Like any other wounds, the longer left untreated, the worse the condition will become. As in other wars, the worst wound is being forgotten."

With the release of funds today, the 110th Congress has provided an extra \$6.7 billion over last year for the largest single funding increase in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs:

- Strengthening quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, in the 5th year of the war in Iraq;
- Investing in much-needed maintenance for VA health care facilities and treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury for returning veterans;
- Reducing the backlog of veterans (400,000 claims) waiting for their earned benefits by adding 1,800 claims processors.
- Building on the first steps by this Congress at the beginning of 2007 -- increasing veterans' health care and benefits by \$5.2 billion for improved care and shorter waiting lines for veterans waiting 177 days to receive their earned benefits.

Over 1 million veterans currently live in the state of New York. Most veterans receiving VA health care are struggling financially, with a median annual income of \$23,000.

The funding increase won widespread support and praise from America's leading veterans' organizations including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Officers Association of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, AmVets, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, National Association for Uniformed Services and Disabled American Veterans.

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